

Ghalib

M. Mujeeb

Ghalib appears by a kind of common consent to be the most outstanding among the Urdu poets and it is essential that his work should be known to the non-Urdu-speaking people of India as well as abroad.

Ghalib followed an established poetic tradition, which he enriched with his own imagination and experience. In his earliest phase his expression, though powerful, ignored the idiom of Urdu and Persian. Then he took to writing in Persian and finally reverted to Urdu. The work of his last phase achieved great popularity and succeeding generations have also found that he expressed his innermost thoughts in the most striking fashion.

Professor M. Mujeeb is a historian and has, therefore, been able to give a vivid picture of Ghalib's age and the poetic traditions he followed. He also has experience as a translator. As early as 1930 he wrote a History of Russian Literature in Urdu which was based largely on translations from Russian. In his book on *The Indian Muslims*, he has given translations from several poets, apart from Ghalib.

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MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

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SAHITYA AKADEMI

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Preface

It needs a great deal of courage to attempt the translation of an Urdu poet's work into English. The translation of Ghalib is all the more difficult, and this work would not have been undertaken but for the stimulating encouragement received from the Sahitya Akademi. The performance of the task itself has been pleasant, because it brought together a number of friends whose help I needed and whose own interest made the interpretation of Ghalib's verses the intellectual pastime of a whole institution.

I wish to thank in particular Dr. Sarup Singh, Professor of English Literature, University of Delhi, Dr. K. Gorowara, Principal, Modern College for Women, Sri Anwar Siddiqui, Lecturer, Jamia College, for kindly reading through the script and suggesting improvements.

Jamia Millia,
New Delhi.

M. Mujeeb

Contents

The Age

MIRZA Asadullah Khan Ghalib was born towards the end of December, 1797, at Agra.

In September, 1796, Perron, a French adventurer, had become chief commander of the 'Imperial Army' of Daulat Rao Sindhia. As chief commander, he was also governor of Hindustan. He besieged and occupied Delhi, appointing one of his officers, le Marchant, governor of the city and custodian of the Emperor, Shah Alam. Then he occupied Agra. He was now supreme in upper India, possessing territory which yielded over one million pounds sterling in annual revenue. He lived in sovereign state in a palace outside Aligarh, from where he issued orders to princes and controlled without interference the civil and military administration of the empire from the Chambal to the Sutlej.[1]

On the 15th September, 1803, General Lake entered Delhi in state, after defeating Bourguien, another French adventurer in the service of Sindhia, who had been in occupation of the city, and had plundered it systematically before abandoning it to the British army. General Lake visited the Emperor and many highsounding titles were bestowed on him. Shah Alam and his successors became impotent pensioners of the East India Company.[2]

The latter half of the 18th century was the great age of European adventurers in India. Men from central and western Asia looking for livelihood and opportunity now came only in insignificant numbers. But they did come. One of them, Mirza Quqan Beg, migrated to India from Samarqand during the last years of Muhammad Shah, and joined the service of Muinul Mulk at Lahore. Little is known about him. One of his sons was Mirza Abdullah Beg, the father of Ghalib, another was Mirza Nasrullah Beg. Abdullah Beg was not at all successful in making a career for himself as a soldier. He found employment first at Lucknow, in the army of Asafuddawlah, then at Hyderabad and finally under Rajah Bakhtawar Singh of Alwar. Mostly

he was what might be translated as 'domesticated son-in-law'. He was killed at Rajgarh, in the principality of Alwar, about 1802, when Ghalib was about five years old. His closest relatives, the Loharu Nawabs, were also descended from immigrants from Turkestan, who came to India about the same time as his grandfather.

Conditions of uncertainty, anarchy and violence, when everything seems to be in the hands of adventurers, put their stamp on social attitudes, and induce an almost permanent mood of melancholy. Sensitive minds are, moreover, at all times more inclined to melancholy than elation. The dissolution of the Mughal Empire, the rise of rural chiefs and the misery caused by the endless contests for power do not form the whole or even the most significant aspects of the background of Ghalib as a poet. Political life had never been broadbased in India, faithfulness to 'salt' had been admired, but loyalty to the state had not been recognised or recognised generally as a moral principle. Well-intentioned rulers did what they could to ensure peace and security, but the rural population almost all over the country contained elements that took to highway robbery whenever they felt they could do so with impunity. It was not so much the chaotic conditions that preceded the imposition of *pax Britannica* or the reactions to British rule as those features of their life which had been constant for centuries that moulded the minds and gave a particular character to the literary self-expression of all who shared in the common urban culture of north India.

This urban culture was narrow-mindedly, obstinately urban. It regarded the city as an oasis in a wilderness, the city wall as the bulwark of culture against a surrounding barbarism. It was only in the city that life could be lived, and the larger the city, the fuller the life. 'Love' and 'madness' could take a man of feeling outside the city, but not the desire to be closer to nature, because it was taken for granted that nature fulfilled itself in the town, and would not be found in a recognisable form in the countryside.

There could be gardens in the town, with multitudes of flowers, with cypresses along paths where the beloved could reveal all her grace of movement, dewdrops could settle like pearls on the petals of flowers, the morning breeze could blow, the nightingale could sing to the rose, the bird in a cage could

look wistfully at those revelling in freedom, the stage could be properly set for the lightning to strike the nest put together with loving care as an abiding symbol of rest and peace. The poetic imagination had, of course, to look for symbols also outside the town. Among these were caravans journeying to remote or vague destinations, heroic battles against storms, the wasteland, the desert and the forest. But it was the town really that offered the widest choice of symbols. Here was the tavern, the saqi, the wine; the puritan with his frown and hypocritical sermonizing; the street, the gateway of the beloved's house with its gate-keeper, the wall in whose shade the lover could sit or against which he could bear his head, the roof on which the beloved could appear, by accident or as a deliberate act of self-manifestation; here, finally was the market-place in which the lover could invite contumely or the scaffold be set up for public executions which the lover could regard as demonstrations of what the beloved's heartlessness could inflict on him. It was in towns that assemblies were held, that candles provided illumination and moths immolated themselves in their flames, that encounters took place between lover and beloved.

We cannot hold the poet responsible for making so much of the town. India had been divided for centuries into two mutually repellent units, the towns and the countryside.

There were other divisions also. Rulers, noblemen, army officers gambled for political power, with stakes high or low according to their ambitions, opportunities or personal disposition; the rest were concerned with seeing that they did not suffer because of the outcome of this or that gamble. Conscience and moral principles were not involved, winning or losing a gamble being a matter of luck. The common interest got lost in a maze of complicated personal and special interests, and anyone who was aware of it or was inspired by it would not have been able to formulate his ideas without using theological terms and thereby raising a theological controversy. The writings of Shah Ismail Shahid (1781-1831), where they touch political issues, reveal how the good man who wanted a just government could only fulminate without being able to say anything precise or meaningful. The poet had the choice of writing odes in praise of the *de facto* possessors of wealth and power, or of living like a dervish, depending for his sustenance on the grace of God and the

charity of his fellowmen. His dependence on a patron would not stand in the way of his writing great poetry, because the patronage of the patron was a matter of form; loyalty and devotion were due to the beloved alone, and the poet was free to embellish his own personality with attributes of his choice. Still, he belonged—if he got anywhere—to elite, and his horizons were defined by the elite view of life.

Another division was that between 'free'[3] men and women. The general opinion that seeing could lead to talking, talking to touching and touching to the complete loss of self-control on both sides, kept men and women strictly apart. It was improper, therefore, to write about 'free' women; they had to be kept out of sight in literature also.[4] Love could not be love that leads to courtship and marriage; the sex of the beloved had to be disguised. The slenderness of the waist could be mentioned; otherwise the poet who did not wish to be suspected of vulgarity could not look below the beloved's chin. This rule was disregarded only during certain interludes of lascivious writing. But following the rule did not mean that the existence of women was ignored. Except where the Persian tradition of representing the beloved as a youth is followed, it is quite obvious that the Urdu poet's beloved is a woman. But it is the conventional forms of behaviour of the beloved that make this obvious, not the description of her physical form. And the setting is not the home; it is the salon of the courtesan.

We learn from the *Muraqqa-i-Delhi,* written in 1739, how courtesans dominated the city's social and cultural life. It would have been more or less the same at Lucknow and other large towns. There is an interesting story of how, some time in the second decade of the 19th century, Shah Ismail Shahid saw small processions of richly dressed women in conveyances of all kinds passing through one of the streets of Delhi. On enquiry he found that they were all courtesans going to the house of one of the eminent members of their profession to attend a celebration of some kind. He thought this a fine opportunity of converting them, and assuming the guise of a faqir, he obtained admission to the house where they were all gathered. He had an impressive personality and, though still a novice in the field of social reform, was well-known enough to be recognised by the hostess as soon as he was presented to her. When asked what

had brought him there he recited verses from the Quran and preached a sermon which brought tears into the eyes of the audience. Such shedding of tears for the sake of her soul was a part of the courtesan's culture, and her giving up her profession because of it would have been regarded as something quite unusual, even if praiseworthy. The courtesans lived according to a code of their own, and if their profession was considered dishonourable, there were quite a few compensating factors.

The 'bazm' or assembly which is so common an image in Urdu poetry could not have been a gathering of friends or a party given by a host to his guests, or a public meeting for cultural intercourse. Such assemblies could not have a 'beloved' or 'rivals' or obnoxious strangers, but the courtesan's salon would, of course, have them. Ghalib could only have had the salon in mind when he says,

> I said that beauty's parlour of strangers
> should be free;
> With cruel wit she turned me out, to show me
> this is how.

Or,

> Ah well, she does not worship God, what if
> she's faithless too;
> Why go to her and risk your soul, if she's
> a snare for you?

The more we examine the situations in which an obviously human beloved is mentioned and observe how she treats the lover, the clearer the identity of the poetic image and the picture of the salon becomes. This does not necessarily mean that all poets who described the beloved's assembly frequented the courtesan's salon, just as it did not mean that they went to the tavern to drink if they wrote about wine. But there can be no doubt that, apart from women of the working classes or maid-servants, courtesans were the only women who could be seen, and who were practised in the art of coquetry, of being sweet or bitter, cruel or charming, graceful in movement and alluring in manner. It was only for 'union' with them that the lover could pine, only they who could fulfill his desires or turn him away. They cultivated the art of conversation along with music

and dancing, and their salons provided the most favourable, one might say, the only opportunities for the exercise of skill in smart and spicy conversation and repartee in a mixed and uninhibited society. It was almost a general rule for singers and dancers to be engaged for festive occasions in well-to-do families, and those who did not have the inclination to visit salons could take advantage of these occasions for displaying their conversational adroitness. Another link between the courtesan and the respectable citizen was created by the celebrations of the 'urs', or death anniversaries of saints, most of which the courtesans were allowed to attend. So we could go a step further and say that the image of the beloved is a projection of the image of the courtesan, the woman without a family context, without attachments and obligations, who could be transformed for that reason into woman as such, into a purely aesthetic concept.

Nineteenth century Philistinism and hypocrisy, as also a genuine anxiety for social reform have attempted to throw a veil over this fact; and on the other hand, the pious, supported by the respectable and the prudish, have done their best to prove that the beloved, like the tavern and the wine, are to be regarded only as symbols, and no as references to unpleasant physical realities. Not much casuistry is required to enable them to prove their point, because the poetic Sufi tradition has transformed all physical states, and specially the relationship between lover and the beloved, into symbols of the Divine, which alone is real. But there is no reason why literary critics of our own time should not have taken social facts into account and rescued the love of the poet from the blame of artificiality which otherwise attaches to it.

To return to social factors which influenced literature. No one with any claim to social status could go out of his house on foot; he had to have some kind of conveyance. Horsedrawn carriages were introduced by the British; riding on horseback was quite common on long journeys, but not inside the town. Respectable citizens used one of the many types of conveyances suspended from or raised over long poles which rested on the shoulders of men who carried them. Apart from other implications, this meant that a man could not walk by himself, he could not stand in the street and watch men going about their business, he could not take the exercise necessary for his health, he

could not mix with the common people. But it was not only in the street that respectability forbade mixing with the common people. One could not do it otherwise also. The religious law declared that all men were equal, and the law was not challenged. But the law did not demand that the high and the low should meet socially as equals, and the social conventions which kept the different classes apart were strictly observed. This may have been due to the influence of the caste system, as certain attitudes and forms and behaviour are not found in other Muslim countries, but the existence of these conventions cannot be denied. They kept the poet away from the people, and poetry away from common sentiment. The only poet who broke through the *cordon sanitaire* of respectability was Nazir Akbarabadi (1739-1830), and the charm of his poetry is evidence enough of the experiences of which the Urdu poet deprived himself by honouring the restraints of respectability. But Nazir was looked down upon by both poets and critics and does not seem to have had any influence on contemporary poets. So the poet had to regard his feelings something purely personal and to keep them as something different and apart from the joys and sorrows of mankind around him.

Travel, too, which is a means of bringing people of different classes together, could not promote integration to any considerable extent. It was difficult to organise, and the countryside was something to be feared rather than loved and enjoyed. Ghalib wrote on one occasion:

> If what the eye sees does not
> rankle in the heart
> Sweet is the flow of life in
> travel spent,

but he in fact disliked and avoided travel. What joy he had in his journey to Calcutta was in meeting people in the towns at which he halted on the way. He was enchanted by Banaras and wrote a long poem in praise of its beauty. He was all admiration for Calcutta too.

Law and custom subjected the individual to society or the community as a whole as well as to the particular group to which he belonged, and this was one of the reasons why sensi-

tive persons sought release in a completely individualistic life of the mind. But apart from this, there was an astonishing degree of compartmentalised living and thinking. The political changes to which reference has been made do not seem to have merited the attention of the poet in a manner that would prove an organic relationship between poetry and political life. There were active Muslim reformers who exercised considerable influence on the public opinion of the community, like Sayyid Ahmad Shahid and Shah Ismail Shahid, but it could be said that they also are largely ignored[5], the 'pious man' and the 'preacher' being in Ghalib's poetry traditional types and no contemporaries. The ghazal form forcefully presents a further degree of compartmentalisation—very trying for the translator—by making every couplet independent of the previous and the following couplet, and requiring every couplet to convey a complete idea or image, so that it could be judged by itself. Sequence of ideas or moods in successive couplets is also found, but as an exception and as an indication, for the fastidious critic, of the poet's inability to express a complete idea in a single verse. It is to this general acceptance of compartmentalisation rather than the despair of achieving anything of enduring value that the indifference to political events in Ghalib's age is due. Among poets, intellectual individualism was further stimulated by the doctrine of the Unity of Existence, which placed man in direct and unconditional relationship with God and made his beliefs, his attitude towards society and the view of life which it represented matters in which he could exercise his own preferences. The individual so isolated had to define, to assert, to glorify himself over against society, to frame his own ideals of existence, to be in communion with the beloved and deny the reality of everything else.

The Man

'LISTEN ! There are two worlds,' says Ghalib in one of his letters, written during the last years of his life, 'one is the world of spirits, other the world of earth and water. . . . The general rule is that those guilty in this world of earth and water have the punishment due to them meted out in the world of spirits, but it has also happened that those guilty in the world of spirits are sent down to the earth for punishment. So I was summoned before the court here on the eighth of Rajab, 1212[6]. For thirteen years I was in judicial custody. Then, on the seventh Rajab, 1225 (1810), sentence of life imprisonment was passed on me, fetters were put on my feet[7], Delhi was fixed upon as my prison and I was brought and imprisoned here. Creative writing in verse and prose was the hard labour imposed on me. Many years later, I escaped from jail and wandered about in the eastern cities for about three years. Ultimately, I was apprehended at Calcutta and locked up in the jail again. When it was found that I was a prisoner liable to be carried away by his feet, handcuffs were put on my hands.[8] With feet torn by fetters and hands bruised by handcuffs, the prescribed hard labour became more difficult to perform. All my strength was drained away. But I am shameless. Last year, leaving the fetters in a corner of the jail, I ran away, and passing through Meerut and Moradabad, reached Rampur. I was there for a few days short of two months, and was then caught and brought back. Now I have sworn never to run away again. And how could I do it even if I wanted to? I haven't even the strength to run. I wonder when the orders for my release will come. I have a faint hope it may be towards the end of this year. In any case, if released, I shall go straight to the world of spirits, for where else but his home does a prisoner go to when he has been set free ?"

This is an example of the flippancy which is one of the delightful characteristics of Ghalib's letters. Apart from the dates and the references to two journeys he made and the weakness due to

ailments and age, almost everything else in this letter is contradicted by other letters, written about the same time but in a different mood.

Ghalib was quite proud of his ancestry, and traced his genealogy back to a remote Achaemenian past. On one occasion, when the Emperor Bahadur Shah was believed to have taken offence at some improper reference made to the 'imperial teacher', the poet Zauq, Ghalib wrote a ghazal, in one of the verses of which he said,

> My ancestors have been warriors for a
> hundred generations,
> I do not need to write poetry to acquire
> honourable status.

But neither his father nor his grandfather distinguished themselves in any way. Their race, their military profession and officer rank, however, entitled Ghalib to be counted among the nobility, and of this he was quite proud. His very name, Mirza Asadullah Khan, indicated his status, which was more than confirmed when, in 1850, Bahadur Shah awarded him the titles of Najmuddaulah Dabirul Mulk Nizam Jang. He was born among the elite and was considered one of them all his life. The 'punishment' he received was largely self-inflicted, and the reason can be easily found in what Ghalib did in this world; the world of spirits does not come into the picture at all.

When Ghalib's father died, his grandfather and aunts took charge of him. They were also well-connected and had adequate, if not ample, means. Ghalib was brought up like a nobleman's son, and must have been pampered all the more because he was extraordinarily handsome. He spent most of his time playing games and flying kites. It is surprising that he learnt anything at all. His marriage to Umrao Begum at the age of thirteen must have been a part of the pampering. No thought seems to have been given to his future. He got no training as a soldier, and was not prepared for any other profession, even government service. He was connected with the family of the Nawabs of Firozpur Jhirka and awarded an allowance of Rs. 1,500/- a year—to be shared equally between him and his younger brother. That was supposed to be enough. In fact it was not, and instead

of finding other means of increasing his income, Ghalib spent a good many years of his life trying to establish his claim to a large share in the revenues of the estate. He added to his difficulties because of spendthrift habits acquired in his youth, which he indulged later by borrowing from money-lenders. Repentance or reform was not in his nature.

'When I was young, a Perfect Guide told me that piety and asceticism did not please him, and he would not forbid gay and sinful living. I could eat and drink and make merry. Only, I should remember to be like the fly that sits on crystal sugar, not like the one that sits on honey. I have acted on this advice.'

He was not alone in acting on this advice. He was a member of what could be called a smart set of relatives and friends. Among other ways of enjoying themselves, they composed verses, and Ghalib—his first pen-name was Asad—must have been a hero among them because of his personal charm and the rugged quality of his verses. He has given a rough description of his appearance in reply to a friend who had sent him a portrait of himself.

'Your picture has added light to my eyes. Having seen it, I do not envy your being tall, because my own height is such that it attracts attention. I do not envy your wheaten complexion, for when I was a live person, my complexion was the colour of sandalwood, and men of taste used to praise it. When I recollect that complexion now, I feel as if a snake were crawling in my breast. But I did feel jealous, and sad too, on seeing that your chin is clean-shaven. It reminded me of past joys. How shall I tell you what I passed through. . . . When white hair appeared in my beard and moustaches, and every third day after shaving it seemed that ants had laid eggs on my cheeks, and what was worse, I lost two of my front teeth, I gave up using *missi*[9] and shaving my beard. But remember, there is a sort of uniformity (of style) in this crude town. Every mullah, hafiz, pedlar, *naicha* winder, washerman, waterman, innkeeper, weaver, vegetable seller has hair on his head and a beard also. The day your humble servant decided to let his beard grow, he began to shave his head.'

From descriptions of him given by others, it appears that Ghalib had a high, aristocratic nose and fine, large eyes. He must have been particularly attractive to women, and been made much of in the salons which he and members of his set must have

frequented, because apart from his personal appearance he was a conversationist of great charm. Once, instead of being the fly which sits on crystal sugar, he sat on honey. Writing a condolence letter to a friend, Mirza Hatim Ali Beg 'Mehr', on the death of his mistress, Chunna Jan, he says:

'Distinction for a lover consists in his being like Majnun. Laila died in his life-time and your loved one had died in yours. Rather, you have excelled Majnun, for Laila died in her own house and your beloved has died in yours. The Mughals are a terrible lot. We kill those for love of whom we are willing to die. I am a Mughal born, and during my life I have been responsible for the death of a domni, who wrought havoc upon hearts. May God be merciful to both of them, and to you and me also, whose hearts bleed because death has parted us from those we loved. It is forty or forty-two years since I left this alley (of love-making), and now I am an ignoramus in this art, but still I sometimes recollect her lovely ways. I shall never forget her death.'

In another letter to Mirza Hatim, he says:

'I must have said somewhere among friends that I would like to see Mirza Hatim Ali. I hear he is a man of accomplishment and taste. And, my friend, I heard about your accomplishments from Mughal Jan, when she was retained by Nawab Hamid Ali Khan and I was intimate with him. Mughal Jan and I conversed freely and by ourselves for hours on end. She also showed me verses you had written in praise of her.'

This gives us an idea of the relationship between noblemen and courtesans. Ghalib must have retained the domni, which would mean that a certain relationship must have been reserved for him alone, but his friends would meet, make a display of their skill in conversation, recite verses and perhaps also drink at her place. Other courtesans, similarly retained, might also have been present. These meetings would be held in different salons by turns, the richer men naturally providing the larger number of parties. Ghalib seems to have underrated the charm of his own personality. The domni fell in love with him, which was not to her interest or his, and to have worried about matters with which she should not have been concerned. The elegy Ghalib wrote on her death is not only deeply moving. It shows, what seldom happened with him, a descent from the refined

atmosphere of poetic love and grief to a keenly felt earthly sorrow, a genuine outburst of purely physical emotion.

'You were convulsed with fears for my sake; why did you give up your practice of indifference? If it was not your desire to fill your heart with the tumult of grief, why did you take to sharing my sorrows? Why did you think you should sympathise with me, when solicitude for me was enmity to yourself? You swore faithfulness to the end of your life, but how would it have helped when life itself is a thing that passes? For fear of bringing shame upon me, you have thrown a veil of earth over yourself; could one do more to maintain the secret dignity of love? The glory of your rose-scattering elegance is gone; now you embroider the dust with flowers. Now the climate of life is like prison to me; it was this climate that did not agree with you. The hand that wielded the sword of beauty is now disabled, and my heart has not as yet tasted the joy of the fatal stroke. The mysterious quality of the oath of love is now mingled with the dust; alas, the ways of friendship have vanished from the earth. How shall one pass the dark nights of the rainy season, when the eyes have become used to counting the stars. The ears hear no message of love, the eyes see no visions of beauty; how can all these deprivations be endured by just one lonely heart? If misfortune was to come, it might have come where I was a stranger; but no, fate willed that I should suffer this disgrace in Delhi, alas, alas !'
A counterpart of this elegy is another ghazal.

New-comers to this land of heart's desires
Be warned, if you have lust for feast and song;
Behold me, if your eyes can see and learn,
Listen, if you have ears for counsels wise—
At night it seemed a gardener's generous hand
Had decked the floor with multitudes of flowers;
The saqi in her splendour menace to God's own light,
The singer's voice waylaying sanity and sense;
The saqi's swaying grace, the lute's melodious note
Heaven of delight for eyes, a paradise for ears—
And when the dawn stole o'er the hall, you'd see
No joy, no gaiety, no merriment or laughter,
Just a lone candle, all by grief consumed,
A silent requiem for the night now dead.'

Where the courtesan's salon was the centre of social life, the 'free' married woman would inevitably be pushed far into the background. A modern biographer has tried to show that Ghalib was fond of his wife[10], but it is obvious that they had nothing in common. Ghalib was careless with money, by temperament happy-go-lucky and gay. He must have been very trying for a wife who wanted ordered living. Umrao Begum gave birth to seven children, all of whom died in infancy. This deprived her of the only consolation that a 'free' woman could have with a husband like Ghalib. Umrao Begum tried to prevent Ghalib from drinking, but she did not succeed. Ultimately, she set apart the crockery used by Ghalib as unclean. He, on his part, would have hated to do anything which might hurt her, and they accepted each other as they were, Umrao Begum becoming more religious with time and devoting herself to prayer and fasting, leaving Ghalib to his sinful ways. His complaint that his marriage was imprisonment for life would be scandalously untrue if he had made it seriously. But his letters are only conversation pieces, full of charming untruths, recapitulations of the miseries of his life and also the most exalted sentiments.

Ghalib's only activity, apart from talking and composing verses, consisted in the efforts he made to improve his financial position. From about 1825, he began pushing his claim to a larger allowance from the Firozpur Jhirka-Loharu estate, and did not give up till 1857. It was in this connection that he made his journey to Calcutta. He went most unwillingly, because there was nothing that he relished less than travelling. But the journey enabled him to meet new people and see India's most modern city. Apart from what he hoped to get from the Firozpur Jhirka-Loharu estate, Ghalib tried to get grants from other sources also. Towards the end he pinned his hopes on the generosity of the Nawabs of Rampur. The requests for payment and the acknowledgements of receipts fill a whole volume of correspondence, now published[11], and make painful reading. It is strange that, throughout the period when he was in financial difficulties, Ghalib seems to have feared no loss of self-respect in writing odes of praise, but he declined, in 1842, to accept government service as a teacher in the newly established Delhi College on a matter of etiquette. His name had been recommended to the Chief Secretary, Thompson, who asked Ghalib to come and see

him. Ghalib went for the interview in a palki. Thompson was informed, and he asked Ghalib to come in. Ghalib alighted from his palki, and waited for Thompson to come out for him. Thompson waited inside. After some time he was told why Ghalib would not come in. So he went out and tried to explain that the etiquette of the darbar required him to come and receive visitors at the entrance, but he was not supposed to receive candidates for appointment in the same way. Ghalib replied that he hoped appointment to government service would add to his status, not reduce it, and came away. This does not make Ghalib's conception of self-respect and status more comprehensible. But what is important for the study of Ghalib is the constant revelation of the fact that, in spite of his aristocratic status, he lived from hand to mouth in a state of the most wretched uncertainty, harassed by his creditors and the apparent indifference of rajahs and nawabs who might have helped. This gives a genuine touch to the suffering he writes of, which might otherwise have been regarded as a fabrication of the poet's imagination.

Nothing, however, could suppress his sense of humour. Once, when he was selling his wardrobe to maintain himself, he wrote to a friend, 'Others live by eating bread, I live by eating my clothes.' In the last years of his life he amused himself by composing chronograms, showing the particular year as the year of death. During one of the years which he had shown in a chronogram as the year of his death there was an epidemic at Delhi, but he escaped. 'There was no error in my prognostication,' he wrote to a friend. 'I thought dying in an epidemic was not good enough for me; really, it would have been beneath my dignity. When the air is clear again, I shall see what can be done.'

After the upheaval of 1857 at Delhi, a certain Pandit Moti Lal, who was serving as a translator under the government of the Panjab, came to Delhi with the Chief Commissioner, Panjab, and out of patriotic sentiment and esteem for poets paid a visit to Mirza Ghalib. In those days Ghalib's pension had been withheld and he was forbidden attendance at official darbars. He was, therefore, feeling intensely depressed and aggrieved. During the conversation with Moti Lal, he said, 'I am a kafir if I failed to drink wine even on one day in my life. and I am no Muslim if I prayed even once. I do not understand why the government has included me among the rebel Muslims'.[12]

Much of Ghalib's wit was exercised on orthodoxy and the orthodox. 'The room in which Mirza Ghalib spent most of his day was above the entrance to his house. On one side of this was a cell, dark and narrow, the door to which was so low that one had to bend double in order to enter it. There was always a carpet spread in this cell, and during the hot windy days Mirza Ghalib stayed there from ten in the morning till about four in the afternoon. Once, when it was Ramazan, the month of fasting, and the season was hot, Mufti Sadruddin Azurdah came to visit him about midday. He was then in the cell, playing chess or chausar[13] with a friend. The Maulana found his way to the cell, and seeing Ghalib playing games in the month of fasting, said, 'I have read in the *Hadith* (Tradition) that Satan is kept locked up during Ramazan, but now I have doubts about the genuineness of this *Hadith*.' 'No, my venerable friend,' Ghalib replied, 'the *Hadith* is perfectly genuine. Only, you must know that this cell is the place where Satan is kept locked up'.[14]

Ghalib never tried of praising wine and of flippantly calling himself a sinner for drinking. But he made no attempt to conceal the fact that he drank. Once when someone reproached him for his habit, he asked innocently what was wrong with it. He was told that the drunkard's prayers were not heard. 'My friend,' he replied, 'when a man has wine to drink, what does he need to pray for?'[15] We do not know how many of his friends shared his habit of drinking, but there is no reeord of his offering wine to his visitors at his house. His friends normally visited him in the evenings to enjoy his conversation, which became more charming with his inebriation. Once his creditors sued him in court for debts mainly incurred to purchase wine. Mufti Sadruddin Azurdah was the judge. In reply to the plaint, Ghalib recited his verse,

Indeed I drank on credit, but also knew for sure
My spendthrift poverty one day my ruin would procure.

The judge smiled, decided the case in favour of the plaintiffs, and paid the amount claimed out of his own pocket.[16]

In 1835, creditors were granted decrees against Ghalib. It was not considered proper to arrest respectable debtors in their homes, but they could be arrested if seen and pointed out to

the court officers outside their homes in day-time. Ghalib was, therefore, obliged to remain indoors, and he set out to meet his friends only after dark. We do not know definitely how long this situation lasted. But there were offences for which respectable people could be arrested even in their homes. Ghalib was fond of playing chausar with stakes. Technically this was 'gambling' and the kotwal[17], either because he was overzealous in the performance of his duties or hostile to Ghalib, caught him once while he was playing and put him in jail. When the case was brought before the magistrate, Ghalib was found guilty, and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200/-. If he failed to pay the fine, such imprisonment was to be extended by six months. Rigorous imprisonment was to be converted into simple if Ghalib paid an additional fine of Rs. 50/-. His simplc imprisonment, which lasted for three months, was in fact only a kind of detention. His friends were allowed to visit him and he was served meals cooked in his own house. But this happened in 1847, when Ghalib was fifty years old and very well-known figure in the aristocratic circles of Delhi. The Emperor Bahadur Shah himself wrote to the Resident recommending his release, but no action could be taken because the matter was already pending in the court. Naturally, imprisonment came as a great shock to Ghalib, who could say anything against himself to his friends but was very sensitive in the matter of his social status. One of his most vigorous and defiant Persian *qasidas* represents his reaction to a system which punished him for being what he was.

> I have man's nature, I am born of man
> And proud that I commit the sins I can . . .
> My worship of the vine I'll ne'er abandon,
> In stormy whirlpools I shall always dive . . .

Ghalib looked at himself from many angles, as the follower of the precepts of the Perfect Guide, filled to the brim with the joy of life, as a helpless creature on whom existence had been inflicted as a punishment, also as someone to whom the opportunity to fulfil himself had been denied.

'Not one in a thousand of the predispositions the Creator endowed me with towards aimless wandering, freedom from the

bondage of relationships, sacrifice and generosity has become manifest. I do not have the physical stamina to take a stick, tie a rug, a tin pot and a rope to it and set out on foot, appearing now in Shiraz, now in Egypt, now in Najaf. Nor do I have the means to play host to a whole world. If I could not make myself responsible for everybody, I could at least see that there was no one without food and clothing in the town where I live.'[18]

The predisposition to wandering Ghalib definitely did not possess. What he liked was to sit at home and talk with his friends. He was particular about returning visits paid to him, but his centre of gravity was his room or verandah. He did not take physical exercise of any kind, and this, combined with a diet consisting almost entirely of meat and bread, must have undermined his health, and produced the ailments and the infirmity of which he complains continuously in the letters he wrote during the last years of his life. About his generosity there can be no doubt. No beggar left his door empty-handed; he did all he could to help his relatives and friends and much of his financial misery was due to his often thoughtless generosity.

In our own times, social philosophies have been evolved which assign to poets and poetry a function which makes them subserve the ends of society and the state. These ends may be the loftiest conceivable, but they deprive the poet of the freedom to be himself. On the other hand, there are critical theories that put the poet so much apart from life that he ceases to be a social being living in a historical context, and has to be appreciated like a work of timeless art. Ghalib was not concerned with the political situation in the country, and by implication regarded the imposition of British rule as something to be accepted. We can criticise him, on this ground, if we choose to, forgetting that it would be difficult to name a single contemporary of his whose patriotism would bear close examination, for even reformers pinned their hopes on the stability and effectiveness of the East India Company's administration. We can also criticise Ghalib for not being aware of the social evils that needed to be eradicated, like superstition, exploitation of the masses, immorality, and for having no interest in or understanding of the contemporary movements of reform. Ghalib kept aloof from what we call public affairs. In the fateful months of

1857, when the city was in a turmoil, he kept to his own house. But the degree of his anguish and his view about the condition of his time is evident from the following ghazal, known to very few even of his admirers because it was omitted from the final selection of his compositions. It is to be noted that the ghazal was written before 1822, and only the last two verses were added later.

Search your own heart, not ask the callous for the source
Of this great pain; be just a mirror, do not seek to draw
The vivid image with the poignant word.

Delhi was gay with flowers, seat of the throne, alas,
The glorious days when beauties gathered here !

I will not fly away, flight is but feverous sorrow, an escape
For smothered cry of pain; but oh, how terrible
The heat pulsating in the straws that make my nest.

Practise your cruel charms, imagine that the moth
Has spring within its heart, and think no more
Of that delirious thing ablaze with its own fire.

On one side of the scale of justice we can place
Inertness of our minds; what of the other side.
Merciful God
Take not into account the heaviness of our sleep.

Every fresh brand upon the heart is yet another heart
Awaiting to be branded; do not ask how vast
Can be the breast facing ordeals of pain.

The walls and doorways of my house of mourning
Are as a meadow overgrown with grass;
Where this is spring, why ask how autumn looks ?

In sheer despair I'm envious of the weak,
the weary left behind;
So hard the road, so heartless my companions
on the why.

After the British had reoccupied the city, Ghalib was in agony because of his friends, many of whom were innocent victims of a blind and cruel repression. Ghalib did not aspire to be a citizen in the democratic, national sense of the term, with mind and speech overloaded with slogans. It was enough for him to be a friend of his friends. 'Every son of Adam,' he wrote in one of his letters, 'be he Muslim, Hindu or Christian, I hold dear and regard as my brother. I do not care if others believe in this or not.' He did not think beyond his personal relationships to the amelioration of society. He cherished his friendships deeply, and was very sensitive to the wishes of his friends. In his letters he does not discuss philosophical questions or matters of public importance. Sharing of beliefs and ideas does not form part of his conception of friendship. It is just a human relationship, more genuine than anything that intellectual agreement can create, more refined and beautiful than anything which moves crowds.

Ghalib, as we have seen, did his best to anticipate his death. In one of his letters, written in 1867, he says :

'Now I am about to die. I eat hardly anything, and diseases have overpowered me. My age is 73 years. "From God we come and to God we return" . . . "Seventy seventy-oner" is the Urdu translation of *pir-i-kharif*, or decrepit old man. I am seventy-three, and therefore decrepit par excellence. My memory has failed me, it seems I never had one at all. I have for long been hard of hearing; now my auditory sense is quite atrophied, like my memory. For about a month friends who have been coming to see me write down what they have to say, if it is anything beyond formal inquiries about my health. My food amounts to nothing. A piece of sugar candy and peeled, powdered almonds in syrup in the morning, thin consomme at midday, four fried kababs early in the evening, wine five tolas in weight with an equal quantity of rose-water before going to sleep. I am decrepit, imbecile, a sinner, a lecher; my face is black with iniquity . . . .'

His chronogram showing 1867 as the year of his death was wasted literary effort. He lived on till the 15th February, 1869.

The Poetic Tradition

The poetic tradition which Ghalib represents was more than literature, more than culture. It expressed, vigorously and coherently, the response of human nature to the problem of human existence. It was a fusion of elements that were philosophical, mystical and aesthetic, also elements that were essentially trivial and ephemeral. The fusion took place in man, and could not take place outside him, in a system of philosophy or mysticism or aesthetics, certainly not in religious dogma. This poetry was, therefore, a means of human self-revelation and self-assertion. Its fault lay in its isolation of the individual, its indifference to social aims, its disregard of such basic institutions as the family and the emotional needs for the fulfilment of which it is maintained, its elevation of experience to pure idea.

This poetry grew as a form and as an outlook on life within the non-Arab Muslim world and may be considered a contribution of the Persian genius and of those who, like the Turks in the west and the Indian Muslims in the east, came under its influence. Its origins can be traced to several sources:

a. The acceptance of human nature as the basis of both the spiritual and the worldly life in the teachings of Islam,

b. The establishment in Islam of a direct relationship between man and his Creator, without any intermediary, such as a church or a separate organisation of those dedicated to the religious life,

c. The inevitable conflict between the legalistic and the mystical approach to religion,

d. The aesthetic sense inherent in man, and

e. The failure to create social and political institutions that could command the loyalty of the intellectually sensitive.

Human nature asserts itself, whatever the prevailing system of belief may be, but as a matter of history, poetry and the fine arts

have flourished most in periods when human thought was man-centred. In ancient Greece, in Europe during the Renaissance and the centuries following, poetry as well as all the other fine arts were more and more widely cultivated. Among Muslims, though the religion itself was man-centred, the legalists succeeded in restraining the development of arts which depended on the pre-sentation of living forms by carrying social opinion with them, and the seclusion of women, also based on a legalistic interpreta-tion of Islamic dogma, created a still greater obstacle. Poetry and architecture were the two main arts in which the aesthetic urge of the Muslim could find free expression, and for obvious reasons poetry provided opportunities to a far large number of persons. It is in the poetry of the tradition with which we are concerned that the implications of Islam as a man-centred religion come into view most prominently and impressively.

The liberty to accept, modify or reject dogma on the basis of their own spiritual experience was demanded and exercised by the Sufis and has a history of its own. We can regard it as a resultant of the attempts of the legalists to give comprehensive-ness and precision to Muslim religious law, the intellectualist attack on certain theological concepts in the ninth century, the defeat of the intellectualists by an alliance between the upholders of theology and the state, the oppressiveness of despotic rule, the denial by the established theological and political systems of the individual's right to think and judge for himself and, what is perhaps most important, the urge of the spiritually sensitive to find their own way to the Absolute. The Sufis were at first sus-pected, and persecuted but they established themselves through their appeal to the masses, and from the twelfth century onwards the Sufi *tariqah* and the orthodox *shariah* became two recognised ways the Muslim could follow, with the option of crossing over from one to the other as and when he liked.

The *shariah* had the support of the state, but in attempting to accommodate within Muslim law an institution as repugnant to Islam as despotic, personal government, the representatives of the *shariah*, the official *ulama*, completely undermined their own moral position. The Muslim was asked to obey the ruler, the ruler was asked to look to the welfare of his subjects, but neither was asked to cooperate with the other habitually and in accord-ance with the ethical precepts of Islam. The consequence of this

failure to integrate the interests of the rulers and subjects on a continuing and moral basis left the sensitive individual no choice but to withdraw within himself, to create a world of his own in which society was ignored, and to carry this world on his shoulders.

The mystic-poetic tradition also prescribed that the truly religious man must rise above distinctions of religion. In its philosophical form this prescription appears in the doctrine of the Unity of Existence—*wahdah-al-wujud,*—and there is a fairly clear trace of continuous conflict between the believers in this Unity and those who upheld the orthodox, transcendentalist point of view. The poet could bow down in reverence before God and the Prophet, and if he was a Shiah, also before the Imams. There were poets like Mir, Anis and Dabir who wrote *marthiahs,* or accounts of the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his family, and little else. Rejection of religion because of atheistic inclinations is completely absent. But it seems to have been regarded as essential for the poet's intellectual dignity to repudiate orthodoxy, its insistence on externals and its indifference to aesthetic values. In this way Urdu poetry, which represents the grafting of the Persian tradition on an indigenous base, brought together all those whom historical circumstances, social laws, ritualistic restraints and traditional beliefs kept apart, stimulating them to realise unity at a high intellectual and aesthetic level. And Ghalib may well claim to be the culminating point of an intellectual, aesthetic and ideologically integrative development which is of great significance in the cultural history of India.

Because of its character and history, the poetic tradition evolved its own symbols. The most basic of these was love.

The subject of love is universal. The unique feature of Persian poetry is the organic assimilation of sacred and profane love in wealth of symbols where the sacred is seen through the profane as light through a prism, and the profane is seen through the sacred as God's light in the nature of man.

Like God, love is essence and attributes, and commands absolute obedience. It is power that creates and destroys, judges and condemns, punishes and purifies, and rewards those who have passed through its ordeals with unutterable bliss. It has many facets. It inspires a wisdom that makes acquired know-

ledge irrelevant, it liberates the spirit from all external forms of obedience, from all obligations inconsistent with its demands, from the opposites of piety and sinfulness, from concepts of reward and punishment, heaven and hell. It can also take the form of love for a person, and express itself as a passion, a madness, a total surrender of the self. Sacred and profane love can also become one and the same thing, the human beloved can acquire the nature of the Absolute, the Absolute can embody itself in the person of the human beloved. It is all within the power of love. Finally, love can also become a quality of the lover, a self-perpetuating fire within the heart, an end and purpose in itself, transfiguring the lover into absolute Man.

It makes the lover, the poet, essential for the manifestation of love. His urge for self-realisation opens his being to the influence of love, and he may or may not need the symbol of a beloved. Two archetypes of lovers are frequently alluded to in Persian and Urdu poetry, the Arab Majnun and the Persian Farhad. Majnun is surrounded with the imagery of the desert, pining to death for Laila; Farhad typifies the striving lover, who will demolish rocky mountains with his pick-axe for the sake of his beloved Shirin. Laila is quite indifferent to Majnun and his fate; Shirin can be won only if Farhad performs an impossible task, and the Emperor who prescribes this task has planned to cheat him of his reward even if he succeeds. But Majnun and Farhad are both mere symbols, which every poet has felt free to interpret as he liked, and not historical figures to be presented in their proper context.

In boyhood I picked up a stone to throw
At Majnun, but it struck me then
That I, too, had a vulnerable head,

says Ghalib. Majnun has become a common noun, meaning anyone who behaves in an abnormal way for romantic reasons.

The image of the beloved is extremely variable in form and meaning, and may be taken to change with the mood of the poet. Here also sacred and profane love dissolve into each other, and the poet who is asked why he conceives his beloved now as a lovely or wily woman, now as a spiritual guide, now as God himself can very well reply that he is not to blame, it

is the beloved who takes on different forms. The poet Khusrau saw one morning that his spiritual preceptor, Shaikh Nizamuddin's eyes were red from lack of sleep. He knew that the Shaikh had been praying all night, but following the poetic fashion he asked, 'In whose arms did you spend the night?' as a jealous and suspicious lover would have asked a fickle woman whom he loved. The poet and mystic Sarmad, condemned to death, saw the executioner approach with a drawn sword. He smiled and said, 'Come, come, in whatever form Thou appearest, I know Thee!' Ghalib says,

> I do not fear the hangman or with the preacher quarrel,
> Whatever the disguise may be,
> I know who comes disguised.

On the other hand, when the poet Nazir says,

> From head to foot wherever I look, a miracle
> Tugs at my heart and says, Behold, I'm here!

he is referring to a human body, and to nothing beyond it. An example of the transition from the physical to the spiritual image is the following couplet of an unknown poet:

> Last night the image of a wanton ringlet
> Entwined itself around my heart—and faded.
> A light, bright as the very face of God.
> Flashed lightning-like within my breast—and faded.

The mystics tranformed the heart into one of their basic symbols. Spiritual experiences were 'occurrences of the heart,' and naturally the poets took over the symbol of the heart with all its meanings. It was the seat of love, of the sovereignty of the will; it was the mystery of mysteries; it was the cause of all misery; it was the active element in man's nature, holding within itself all dynamic power, all power to create, change and destroy.

The Muslim has been told to avoid drinking, and theological and public opinion has for centuries made a virtue out of this particular form of prescribed abstinence. The question

whether those who drink in spite of this prohibition commit a sin does not need to be discussed here; the poets have branded as hypocrites those who made a virtue of abstinence from wine. In Persian poetry, the *sāqi* who poured out wine to the assembled guests, wine itself, and the *mai-khana*, or tavern, were elevated into lofty spiritual symbols. These symbols have been retained in Urdu poetry. Mosque and tavern have been contrasted as representing two opposite paths. Kaaba and the temple, the shaikh (here meaning not the Sufi shaikh, but the learned man, the man of external piety, the sermonizer) and the Brahman are other forms of this same contrast.

The frequency of executions and violent deaths could not fail to affect the minds of the poets or the generality of the people. Mansur Hallaj, the Sufi who was hanged or crucified for saying, 'I am the Truth' or, in other words, 'I am God', became the symbol of spiritual self-assertion, and 'gallows' (*dār*) and 'halter' (*rasan*) symbolic of what a man should expect for fearless utterance of the truth. Sword, dagger, bow and arrow inevitably crept in as poetic images. Their use is sometimes distasteful to us, but even in Ghalib's time these weapons were too much in evidence for reference to them to be considered incongruous. The term executioner (*qātil*) for the beloved also continues to be used, but it is, like *kāfir*, mainly a term of endearment.

Ghalib imbibed the whole poetic tradition and its symbolism as a part of his education and felt no desire for aesthetic or literary adventures that would take him away from it. Did he, for this reason, lose his identity and deprive himself of the opportunity to be original? Experiments in new forms in contemporary Urdu poetry have undoubtedly enriched it, but except for some die-hard innovators the general tendency has been to revert to the ghazal of Ghalib's days, dipping and dyeing the themes, as it were, in a more varied if not richer experience. It was, however, primarily against the ghazal that modernist innovators had revolted, and the reasons for the reversion to the old form in a new spirit will enable us to understand to what extent Ghalib could maintain his identity and claim originality even while scrupulously following the inherited patterns.

The ghazal, roughly defined, consists of couplets in the same metre, the second line ending in words that rhyme according to certain rules. The number of couplets in a ghazal can vary; the

general practice has been to make each couplet self-sufficient, and there could be eight different themes in a ghazal of eight couplets. The aim was concentrated, epigrammatic and, of course, striking expression. The objection to the ghazal as a form has been that it forced the poet to look for words that rhymed together rather than for ideas worthy of expression. What was equally bad, ideas or sentiments had to be fitted within a given framework of expression, form was not moulded by substance, but substance by form. Both these objections are valid. But the typical ghazal has the charm of music as well as beauty of language; its appeal is immediate and difficult to resist. What its critics in fact resented was the popularity of the ghazal. This has not only survived their objections but has transformed the genuine poets among them into masters of the ghazal style.

Ghalib as Poet

GHALIB has made varying statements about the age at which he began to compose verses; the earliest is ten and the latest fifteen. His education was not systematic, and his experiments in versification must have begun before his literary attainment was anywhere near adequate. He took to poetry at the same time as he began to indulge in what he calls 'frivolities' and 'wickedness and immorality', that is, with adolescence. This was about the time he was married and became entitled, because of marriage, to associate with somewhat older persons, who would also have combined composition of verses with 'wickedness and immorality'. We are left to conjecture who, if anyone, gave him encouragement and guidance, and inspired him with the confidence necessary to cross his first literary hurdles and disregard his failures. We cannot trace his development as a poet because non of his earlier compositions can be dated. Besides, whenever a poet's ghazals were collected, they were always arranged alphabetically according to the last letter of the rhyming words, so that a ghazal written earlier could be placed much later in a collection. Finally, Ghalib made the first selection of his ghazals himself, now found in what is called the Bhopal Mss., and what he did not include in this selection has been lost for ever.

Till 1822, when he was twenty-five years old, Ghalib wrote in Urdu. Then he took to writing in Persian, a language for which he had great affection and admiration, and which he thought offered him better opportunity for self-expression than Urdu.[19] By this time he had made a thorough study of all the masters who were held in general esteem, but it was typical of him that to establish his claim to authoritative knowledge of Persian idiom, he first invented and later denied the story of a mysterious Iranian who came and stayed at his house in Agra for two years and taught him the language. The phase of writing almost exclusively in Persian lasted till 1850, when Ghalib began to be invited to the court and had to write in the language of the court, Urdu, but he did not give up Persian. The seven

years that followed are regarded as the mature phase of his Urdu poetry.

There are qualities common to the earlier and the later phase of Ghalib's Urdu poetry, which began from 1850. The lyrical element is more prominent in the later phase, but Ghalib maintained to the end his habit of drawing a few strokes and leaving it to the comprehension of his listeners or readers to complete the image. There are plenty of his verses in the apparently simple language of the second phase about the meaning of which critics are in doubt. Ghalib also did not surrender his individualism or his intellectuality, but in the court, and as a poet recognised by the court, he had to take his place among those whose poetry represented entirely different and much lower values. The compromise Ghalib made with the spoken idiom and the prevailing taste, though at some sacrifice of his independent genius, endeared him to the lovers of Urdu poetry. He was no longer the peak with its snows shimmering in the distance; one could see the mountain-side also, with its forests, its breezes, its rivulets of snow changing into streams as they descended to the valley below.

It was natural for Ghalib to be influenced by other poets, specially those who were admired by his contemporaries. He has acknowledged Bedil as his master with an astonishing frankness and sincerity.

> My admiration is so passionate, I cannot portray
> The majesty of Bedil's genius; how can a drop
> Reveal the ecstasies the vast ocean bears?

Bedil wrote in Persian, in a style extremely erudite and involved, and Ghalib's early compositions are an obvious attempt to write in the same style in Urdu. A learned critic has given numerous examples to show the influence of other poets, Persian and Urdu, on Ghalib.[20] The practice of holding mushairas, for which the metre and rhyme were announced in advance, tended to establish a uniformity by making the audience into judges of the merit of a composition through straightforward or oblique approbation or silence. It would also stimulate the urge to excel, but the prevailing taste would be the decisive factor. For us the question would inevitably arise whether a

ghazal, for which the occasion as well as the rhyme and metre were prescribed, could be a spontaneous and genuine poetic composition. But connoisseurs would know at once whether a poet was just offering a literary exercise in one of the approved and admired styles or had an individuality of his own. Traditional criticism distinguished between 'what comes' to the poet's mind as inspiration and 'what is brought in' by him as it were to fill in a blank, between the spontaneous and the forced elements of a ghazal. There is no doubt that, with all the symbols ready to hand and the general tendency to admire dextrous manipulation of the spoken idiom, much that was mere versification could pass off as poetry.

Ghalib was a poet by nature. He was extremely sensitive to public opinion, but determined at all costs to avoid the commonplace. His first audiences, whether elders or friends of about the same age, few or many, must have been taken aback by his not saying what they expected him to say, even though he did not break with the poetic tradition, and using an idiom of his own to say what de did. He did not offer them the known pleasures of poetry, but a challange to discover the meaning he had created. They could not ignore him; that would imply inability to understand; it would be confession of defeat. Besides, there was the majestic rhythm of his verse, the startling combination of words, never before attempted in Urdu, to convey shades of meaning which the same words did not express when used in the conventional way. There was the condensation of thought, which went far beyond the neat, epigrammatic phrases of those who excelled in skilful handling of the spoken idiom. It is true that words and meanings were sometimes stretched to the breaking point, and Ghalib got lost in intricate landscapes of words instead of giving striking form to an idea. There is a story that an elderly admirer of his youthful genius once strung together imposing words in an utterly meaningless combination and recited the verse as something remarkable that had come to his notice. In response to Ghalib's blank stare he admitted at once that the verse made no sense, but this could be the case with other verses also if the poet forgot that good poetry had to be intelligible.

Many examples could be given to show that in his earlier period Ghalib delighted in involved expression, following the

style of Bedil and some other poets. But if poetry was to be the creation of new meaning in the old symbols, an addition of fresh intellectual and aesthetic experience to the traditional content of poetry, Ghalib felt that a new vocabulary would have to be assembled to serve as the medium. He fashioned this new medium for himself by a fusion of the vocabulary of both Persian and Urdu, exercising a freedom that was not inhibited by the idiom of either language. He achieved something unique. Even where the sequence of ideas is difficult to establish, the language holds the reader enthralled.

What was the new meaning Ghalib attempted to create, the fresh intellectual and aesthetic experience he desired to transmit? Let us take as an illustration a verse from his earlier phase.

> Purposeless travail all endeavour
> To make this life fit prelude to the next:
> Walk the exalted path of love, distress of spirit
> Is just a passing thought of weariness and rest.

A translation does not suffice. We must paraphrase, we must expand the concentrated expression to convey all that is implied. 'We are told,' Ghalib says, 'that man must bring his life on earth into accord with the life hereafter, to coordinate the immediate with the ultimate. This is tedious and unavailing. If we accept it, we ignore life's real purpose, which is to give free rein to our natural, aesthetic urge, to love, to the ardour of passion, to all that is essentially human in us. Let us be fully, richly human, let us make life into a ceaseless movement, and if ever we feel weary, let us assume that it is because we have wanted to rest, and not because the way is long. The weariness will pass as soon as we have started on our journey again.'

Some will observe at once that this is an instigation to moral anarchy, some will want an analysis and elucidation of love and ardour and passion and the ceaseless movement they create; most, let us admit, will just not understand. It is not difficult to see why. Those who believe in moral order do not realise that order is not an end in itself, it must lead to something. Those who demand clarity of ideas tend to be satisfied with clarity. Those who do not understand imagine that the function of the poet is to express romantic sentiments in a charming way; they want

the poet to feel and speak at their own level, so that they can be pleased and mildly excited. They want to avoid, so far as possible, the strain of thinking; they have accepted what is, they do not wish to turn their backs on everything in the contemplation of what could be, of what must be, if man is to be man and life to be really man's discovery of himself. Ghalib cannot tell us what he was discovered, he can only stimulate the urge to make discoveries. It is not the poet's function to satisfy, but to create a dissatisfaction so deep, a restlessness so unabating that we are forced to think about life's possibilities—a thinking that makes living a significant experience.

Or let us take another example :

> The lightning flash of beauty has consumed my sight,
> Only the eye-lashes remain, like smouldering twigs,
> Impudent relics of a burnt-out flame.
>
> I have so strained my eyes in the endeavour
> To see the vision again, that tears have washed away
> All but my self-centredness; there's nothing left
> Except the glance, clear as the dew-drop's sparkle.
>
> The garden of desire has fallen victim
> To autumn's withering hand, and spring again
> Will come, as pale and bloodless as my sighs.
>
> The wonder of the saqi's eyes is gone, no more
> The festive cup goes round, and glum vicissitude
> Is all the company I have.

This can be construed, of course, as a mood of utter pessimism, a repetition, in a different and complicated form, of what other poets have said with greater lucidity. But if we examine the verses closely, we will find almost a precise description of the stages by which the mood changes. The poet has beheld beauty, like a sudden flash of lightning it has struck him blind, consumed his sight, leaving only a few smouldering eye-lashes, and it seems impudent that they should show a trace of the fire when there is really nothing left. But the eye was made to see, it will not give up being what it is. However, all that its self-assertion produces is the glance, like the sparkling dew-

drop. It is pure, no doubt, but only a dew-drop. Or, to put it differently, the bloom of the garden is gone; it had to go, because autumn is inevitable, inexorable, and all that the passion to recreate the flowers of the garden will produce is a pale, colourless spring, as satisfying as the relief one gets from a deep sigh. Or, coming down to the images of daily life, one cannot look into the saqi's eyes and be filled with wonder, one cannot drain the cup and ask that it be refilled, one has to live with time, with meaningless change.

If in saying this, Ghalib claimed to have created a new meaning, he was justified.

Traditional methods of criticism have been applied to the final and popular edition of Ghalib's ghazals; his earlier phase has been almost completely ignored. Critics of the traditional type have been ignorant of any literature other than Urdu and Persian, and incapable of isolating any new meaning apart from showing how concepts of the beloved, the rival, jealousy, etc. had been given a novel and individual expression. Critics of the modern type, who have had the opportunity—seldom utilised—of a comparative study of literatures and literary movements have been so obsessed by canons of Marxist criticism that their historical and literary perspective has been distorted, and the idea of a free, creative human personality is incomprehensible to them. Those not so obsessed are themselves lacking in the experience and sensitivity necessary to appreciate the working of the creative human mind. In the only study of the poetry of Ghalib's earliest phase it does not appear that Ghalib had any knowledge of the existence of women, or that his image of the beloved was in any sense a reflection of women he had loved. Ghalib is thus by implication accused of that artificiality of sentiment which the use of stylised symbols suggests, and also of that isolation from the realities of physical and social life which literary convention required, but which it was impossible for a person so full-blooded as Ghalib to accept.

For the understanding of Ghalib it is necessary to emphasise that poetry represented for him above all a form of aesthetic and intellectual self-assertion. Where self assertion is the urge to attain self-realisation in and through some system of thought or belief, the results are different. We are concerned here with the self-assertion of the poet (and only of the Persian and Urdu poet)

as an end in itself, as a striving for release from all that fetters the mind and the heart, as a search for the ultimate freedom. This self-assertion implies a negation of everything except the poetic mood and the poetic image. Every mood has to be taken by itself, as complete and self-sufficient, and the change of mood has to be accepted as inevitable, because existence itself is a process of continuous change. Further, if the change of mood is to be brought home, it must be abrupt, not gradual. The ghazal exhibits in an exaggerated form the poet's right as well as his ability to change his mood. Any attempt at a synthesis of mood for the purpose of determining a poet's ideas or beliefs could be a repetition of Khwaja Nasiruddin's experiment of cutting off the legs and the neck of the stork to make it look like other birds. All that the critic can do without encroaching on the poet's freedom is to look for the most prevalent moods, or those which appear most in keeping with the poet's real nature, when all his powers are fused together in the creation of the poetic image.

Ghalib's most usual mood could be described as one of negation, expressing itself in his discontent disillusionment, restlessness, pain, grief, and leading on to a denial of the value of physical existence because of its many limitations. This is both a logical and natural consequence of his urge for self-assertion, which brings him into continuous conflict with physical reality, a struggle in which the living spirit is always defeated and always returns to the fray. The mood of negation has its own symbols—wilderness, desert, lightning flash, chains, wounds, and the corresponding conditions are madness, despondency, tears, sighs, lamentation, pain of unfulfilled desires. The evils and afflictions of life are the necessary consequence of physical existence; Ghalib sometimes blames it all on awareness, both of what is and of what could be, now taking the form of madness and rejecting the world of ordered living in favour of the desert, now demanding of God something more worthy of man than the heaven and earth he has created. But this mood of negation, however often we may come across it in Ghalib, is not an obsession. It overflows in to other moods and is in its turn softened by them. And however intense and absolute the negation may be, it is not final, for man remains.

Ghalib's religious mood, which can be called religious only in a

nominal sense, is not a primary but a secondary mood. He had studied the literature of Sufism and took for granted the doctrine of the Unity of Existence. But the company of the pious was odious to him, even as an idea, and he was too intellectual, too self-centred, too headstrong in his freedom for that absorption in the world of the spirit which is basic to the mystical experience. He could not aspire to the bliss of annihilation in God; annihilation was not possible because life, 'madness', pervaded every particle of the universe. And when God's mercy embraced even those who did not ask for it by falling into error and sin, when, as Spring, it came to intercede for the lovers of wine, Ghalib could address God almost as a court favourite would talk to his sovereign lord, light-hearted, flippant, apologetic but never serious about his own offences of ommission and commission. And he could not ask for anything, because nothing was worth having except a heart that had no desires.

Ghalib's mood of love is too intellectual to have a deeply emotional quality. He has more the nature of a rebel than of a person seeking to surrender his self to the beloved, and while he recognises the power of beauty and is sometimes overwhelmed by it, he cannot forget or deny his nature. In the later phase, his images of the lover and beloved and the sorrows of love often become conventional and to that degree a lapse from his own aesthetic standards, though even where he is conventional his individuality is striking. In one of his ghazals where the mood is continuous, he is more concerned with himself than with the beloved, who appears as a figure on the roof with dark tresses scattered on her face, or as sitting opposite, the daggers of her eyelashes sharpened with collyrium, or as a youthful countenance flushed with wine. These are passing fancies, conventional, unreal; he ends with the desire to remain in perpetual contemplation of the beloved, the beloved as such, an ineffable creation of the aesthetic mood. Ghalib's aspiration was the pure aesthetic experience, a glory that is known neither to the lover nor to the beloved, but encompasses born.

Nature did not inspire any of Ghalib's moods. He had an urban mind, and he could regard nature only as a background to human life. The supreme poetic image, the creator as well as the creation of Ghalib's poetry, is man himself, and Ghalib's loftiest and fairly constant mood is contemplation of his humanity.

No matter how far an intellectual or a romantic quest might take him, he returns to himself, to man. Man is the garden with its flower, the desert waste, the lover seeking union with the beloved, the pawn in the game of being and non-being, the agonising awareness of reality, the rebel, the creature crushed to dust by fate, the detached spectator, ironical, flippant, the beautiful sin that captivates Mercy, the madness that would reduce creation to chaos. Ghalib did not discover man, but he invested him with a new insight into his own nature and the nature of life, with a passion for intellectual adventure and a courage to reject, with a confident, meaningful smile, or sheer disgust, conditions of existence which encroached upon his freedom and dignity.

Translations

GHALIB's Urdu compositions, as already stated, have an earlier and a later phase. In the later phase, his language possesses all the excellence which lovers of Urdu poetry cherish, but quite a number of ghazals and verses which are on the lips of his admirers—and they are a vast and fastidious multitude—are distinguished primarily by the beauty of language or by the elevated or striking expression of traditional sentiments. Such ghazals and verses are not untranslatable; but any rendering into English would appear sacrilegious to anyone who knows both English and Urdu. It appeared more judicious, in the interests of both Ghalib and the present translator, to make a selection not on the basis of what is best known and most admired but of thought-content and imagery. From the selections Ghalib himself made it seemed to the translator that he was a poor judge of his own work, and in a way it was necessary to redress the balance in favour of what was unique in Ghalib as against what he thought would appeal most to the literary taste of his time. The ghazals and verses here translated are mainly from the earlier phase, and not from the well-known edition, but the translator has consulted a number of persons with literary taste and not relied on his own judgement only.

Something needs to be said to prepare the reader of the translations who is not acquainted with the characteristics of the ghazal. He must not expect sequence of ideas or moods, or unity of any kind. The ghazal is not a poem in the commonly accepted sense. It is 'a succession of couplets often startling in their independence, in their giddy transition from grave to gay, from thought to mood. . . . Each couplet is a whole in itself, a *nukta* or "point", sufficiently beautiful if it be adequately expressed, and not of necessity owing anything or adding anything to that which comes before or after'.[21] The reader must, therefore, take each couplet by itself, and proceed to the next as if to something new and entirely different.

There is no arrangement of ghazals and verses which the translator could have followed. He has, therefore, felt at liberty to change the alphabetical order of the original and made a rough grouping in accordance with topic, mood and image.

1

The tongue must beg Thee for the power of speech,
For silence has its way to catch Thy ear.
In days of gloom the stricken cry to Thee,
For Thine the lamp faint in the morning light,
Thine the despondent autumn flower.
Wondrous and colourful for the sight what man endures—
Thy work the henna'ed feet of death, in blood of lovers dipped...
Aside from spell cast by the prayer that's granted,
Thou givest piquancy to cry of pain,
And lamentation becomes music for Thy ear.
Meadow on meadow lush within
The mirror of desire is Thine,
And hope lost in delight of gardens yet to be.
Our worship is a veil, Thou dost adore Thyself—
For Thine the suppliant forehead, Thine
The threshold where it rests
Resourceful in excuses, Mercy lies in wait
To bring us near to Thee;
To Thee we owe fulfilment and the pain
Of trials endured,
Sad and beyond belief
Asad should be as in a magic cage confined,
When grace of movement, garden, morning breeze
Are Thine to give.

2

More thrilling than wild dreams of pastures green
Is resignation to the will of God:
His are the fields thirsting for rain and His
The carefree rain-clouds floating gracefully away.
Prostrate as suppliant, of prostration proud,
Submitting to God's will and yet arraying
Claims to His favour—impudence, conceit!

3

How long, O God, this begging for fulfilment of desire?
Grant me the grace to raise my hands aloft in prayer.

4

You men of petty hopes, what makes you proud?
You pray out of perplexity, and pray in vain.

5

The ardour of our love reveals Thy glory; Thy world
Would be but a poor mirror for Thy face.

6

A vessel of exuberant splendour every particle of dust:
The passion to behold Thyself has wondrous power
To make Thy image mirror of itself.

7

Illusion of existence is a desert, here to wander
Is foolishness when still your mind is fixed
In notions immature of high and low
and smooth and stony ground.

8

Beauty, let me behold Thee once in all Thy glory!
How long am I to peer
At images in the mirror of my mind?

9

In this tavern of fascination every grain of dust
Is like a cup which filled is passed around,
A lover moving all in tune
With the beloved's roving glance.

It's we who have no ear for melodies divine—
They are only concealed as music in the string.

10

Existence of the sea consists
In forms appearing, vanishing;
The drop, the bubble and the wave
Have in themselves no meaning.

11

If only I could raise my eyes I'd see
Splendour on splendour face to face;
I do not look, how could I bear
A graciousness so great?

12

Love's passion to the lowly gives means to exalt themselves;
A grain of sand the desert holds, a drop contains the sea.

13

The God I worship is beyond the boundaries of sense:
The Ka'ba is for those endowed with vision
Only a sign-post telling travellers where to go.

14

We may be deft iconoclasts, but being what we are
Some pagan deity will still confront us on the way.

15

*The real faith is constancy: the Brahman

*Verses marked with an asterisk have already appeared in my book, *The Indian Muslims*, and are reproduced here with the kind permission of Messers George Allen and Unwin, London.

Who in the temple lives and dies is worthy
Of honoured burial in the House of God.

*What is the temple, what is the Ka'ba?
Baffled passion for union constructing
Myths and illusions, asylums to shelter
Its ardour, its hopes, its dreams and despair.

16

*At every step the weary stopped and stayed,
Not finding Thee, they built Thy house and prayed.

17

*God is One, that is our faith,
All rituals we abjure;
'Tis only when religions vanish
That belief is pure.

18

If you have faith that God will grant your prayer,
Then do not ask for anything at all;
And if you do, ask only for a heart
That has no fear, no aim and no desire.

19

The ocean's tumult overruns the staidness of the shore:
Where you as saqi pour the wine, sobriety holds no more.

20

I'm lost in ecstasy, there is no means
For me to know about myself.

21

It cannot see the ocean in the drop,
the whole within the part:

Call it a children's plaything, not an eye
With vision endowed.
The drop merged in the river attains the supreme bliss—
Pain lost in its excess becomes a healing balm.

22

Shame at unworthiness is my offering God's grace to win,
And claims to pious living dyed a hundred times in sin,

23

How all-embracing is God's mercy, even I, a heathen
With no sins to commend me, am forgiven.

24

'T will not be strange should Mercy find it pleasing
That I for shame offer no plea for sin,

25

Behind which veil is Mercy now concealed, preening itself,
Mercy which pleads for humbly silent lips and lowered eyes?

26

The stream of sinfulness was all soaked dry,
And I had just dipped in the border of my cloak.

27

He gave me both the worlds and thought I was content,
And there was I, ashamed to ask for more.

28

I think of all the scars left by smothered desires
And temptations resisted; ask me not, O God,
For an account of sins I have committed.

Gardens in bloom I love, but long to pluck their flowers
Forgive this sin against myself and Thee, Creator of the spring.

My own desires in multitudes trample me under foot;
It's blasphemy to feel aggrieved and thankless to complain.

29

It's He who gave me life and if I died for Him
I still in truth have done less than was due from me.

30

'T was wine that I could drink and hold, the lightning
That struck Mount Sinai should have fallen on me.

31

Eager imagining of joys to be is burden of my song:
I am a nightingale, my garden yet unborn.

32

Strength is the sharp gust of wind, fanning the flame of thought
My grief, be more of fire, my heart, be th' unburnt brick
Asking for heat more binding, more intense.

33

If headstrong ardour seeks to acquire the quality of madness,
Let it traverse both heaven and earth and find
The journey lasts no more than
momentary numbness of the feet.

34

A song that dwells within the singer's throat,
An ecstasy that needs no wine:
Be sinful charm incarnate, and your head
Before the pious multitude incline.

The urge to restrain madness gives the eye
A greater freshness than the bloom of spring;
Suppression of the cry of pain will saturate the heart
And make it far more lush than meadows green.

35

Extreme despair can disregard the evil eye of time:
Eternal spring is born of sighs unheard, unheeded.

36

A thousand caravans of desire have perished in the desert waste,
Yet headstrong longing for adventure will not draw the rein.

37

My heart, a faded rose, a blown out taper's smoke
Will not companionship attract; why then indulge
In one brief passion for the sight
Of tresses scattered in the night.

The hourglass of allotted time.
On a mere bubble rests: what use to claim
That we shall drink a sea of wine
And probe the depths of ecstasy?

When hope fulfilled is image on the desert air
Why in the vale of unfulfilled desire
Roam aimless and forlorn.

38

Life's not a journey with an end, there is no rest in death.
We move not on, but slip and slide
On unsure, trembling feet.

Sleep, armed with dreams, lies constantly in wait
To rob the eye of sight; the evening hides
In shadows to destroy the light of day.

39

Pride in balance and peace of mind
Is self-deception of the innocent: our fate
Loads us with secrets, tortures for the heart.

40

A world of madness lies in wait
Within this magic earth:
How vain the hope death will provide
The bliss of being no more.

41

Flowers do not bloom, sparks shoot up and vanish,
Life is all ardour, the desire to grow
In silent strength we must forego.

42

There is no harmony, no music, our lament
Is but an echo lost among the hills;
Existence does not mean the courage to invent
The tune that all life's frenzy stills.

43

I've seen how joys and sorrows in this world keep faith:
The harvest I have reaped was one long, drowsy life.

44

Grumbling and gratitude the sickly fruit of fear and hope—
A curse upon awareness and this affliction called the heart.

The knots of sanity united, my heart now feels
The joy of freedom, and its headstrong passion
Can join the wild frolic of the whirlwind's dance.

The very blisters on my feet, symbols of eagerness,
Are shaped like cups; how can my feeble mind conceive
The ecstasies of the tavern at the journey's end?

The ties of friendship are the foam of wine; make merry,
Nor ask what lies behind the veil of revelry.

Both heaven and earth can in the twinkling of an eye
Dissolve into tumultuous chaos; tranquillity and peace
Are manifest only to the cold, sightless stare of death.

The morning breeze gives it no fairy wings,
Its flame is not burning frenzy of love;
The agonising mystery of a melting heart
Is all the taper can reveal at dawn.

45

Ravished by song of nightingale martyr to laughter of the rose,
I still aspire to peace of mind, fear notoriety and disgrace.

46

My breath is as a sea where I unconscious drift:
Can I complain if on her side the saqi
Treats me with sweet neglect?

47

The heart has let itself be talked about so much, even the note
Deep hidden in the string, soon as the lute is played
Appears as passion's naked cry.

48

Mystery of an ecstatic heart beyond this flood tears—
I have another tavern yet the other side this stream.

I've smashed my flagons and my cups, what do I care
If rose-red wine now falls as rain from heaven.

49

I'm so cooped up in time and space
I cannot even shed tears enough:
Give me a desert if I must invite the sea.

50

How can human insensibility discover
Meaning of life, when ears are deaf
While hearts yearn passionately for song?

51

The universe was made for ceaseless roving:
The travellers, weary, built this halting-place and that.

52

If mere contentment be the end
To which frenzied impatience leads,
I'd rather have the cup, now empty and now full
Than time and circumstance, now cruel and now kind.

53

I was not granted space enough
To let one mad notion scamper free;
The desert's vastness as a fateful image
I've sighed and carried to the world to be.

54

The generous urge of spring unites poppy and rose, my fate
Has made me, like the poppy's stain,
dwell in the heart of flowers.
The glow of life with petals clothes the rose, and then
The petals fall; when I in madness tore my rags
They were stitched up with thorns.

I have no spirit left and the whole world
Resounds with lamentation, I am passive dust
Thrown up by mourners in their hired grief.

Because of me each particle with longing overflows, whose heart
Am I, that I am so immersed in heaven and earth?

55

Like the commotion of the Judgement Day I roam
Across the worlds, seeking myself;
My dust whirls on the other side
Of non-being's barren waste.

Shy not at sight of me, you who've imbibed the illusion
Of streamlined sense and knowledge;
Dust of the road is all I am, my twists and twirls
Have no intent, no meaning.

56

Come, do not fear to tell me, though in a cage I pine,
What happened in the garden yesterday; the nest, my friend,
Struck by the lightning need not have been mine.

57

The seen is deeper hidden that the unseen;
They are indeed asleep who have awakened in a dream.

58

How exquisite the joy of lovers privileged to die!
The lustre of the naked sword is glory for the eye.

It is so very hard to do even the things we can,
A son of Adam is denied the chance to be a man.

59

The house reflects the quality of him who in it dwells:
Majnun is dead, the wilderness is all sobriety and gloom.

60

Madness has overpowered me, heedless I roam;
The wilderness itself comes out to take me from my home..

61

Love is jealous indeed of every appanage of life:
Paint Majnun how you will, his frenzy
Shines naked, undisguised.

62

Mortgaged heart and soul to love
And yet to life inseparably attached,
The lightning flash I worship as my God
And wring my hand at the destruction wrought.

63

See how inventiveness our faculties inverts, the sight
Will take to peddling images and thoughts will mirrors make..

64

Each wave a net with gaping, monstrous mouths,
Let's see how fares the drop destined to be a pearl.[22]

65

From the stone's veins would flow a constant stream of blood,.
If what you see in me as grief were there as spark embedded.

I am so sick of life, the fragrance
Of the beloved's garments does not penetrate
My senses; why should I be aggrieved
If morning breezes wander where they list?

66

Grief wears out life, but how can we
Escape, the heart being what it is?
Had not love brought us sorrow we would be
Plagued with the sorrows of this world.

67

My home would have been desolate even without my tears:
The sea would be a desert were it not a sea.

68

My eyes are open and the garden enchanting for the sight,
But all in vain, I am the dew-drop which the sun has touched.

69

Utter indifference prevents my seeking ways
To give up solitude; as for dishonour, why,
My very breath forges the chains
That hold me prisoner to disgrace.

70

I'am not a melody bursting like a flower
Or a string with tunes replete;
I am a chord that has just snapped,
Sound of my own defeat.

71

Though some may reappear as flowers,
how sad to contemplate
The lovely faces that have vanished in the dust!
My mind too was once full of memories
Of friendly gatherings, wine and gaiety,
But they are all now delicate traceries
Adorning the dark corridors of time.

*Tis just a glimpse we get, our life is that, no more;
We are but sparks that dance their way to darkness, and no more.

What else but death can put an end to griefs that life will spawn;
It is the taper's fate to burn, splutter and flicker till the dawn.

72

*I long to live in utter loneliness.
With none to speak to, none to share my thoughts,

In a sheer dwelling without walls and roofs,
Or neighbours guarding against fate and thieves,

With none to tend me if I'm sick and prostrate,
And none to mourn me if I pass away.

73

My life's a horse in headlong gallop,
Where will it stop and when?
I've lost hold of the reins, my feet
Have from the stirrups slipped.

74

I follow for a while one whom I see swiftly stride:
I have no goal, I do not know my guide.

75

Walking the common road brought blisters on my feet,
Now I rejoice—the way leads across thorny bushes:
There must be a beyond.

76

The onrush of ideas makes my heart shudder like a wave;
The cup is delicate, the wine such as will melt the glass.

The sorrows of the free last but a moment, we
Bring down the lightning to enkindle
The taper in our house of mourning.

77

Where is soaring desire to set its other foot, O God?
The imprint of one foot has covered this desert of a world.

78

Man is a multitude of thoughts, even by himself;
I feel I've company around, when I am most alone.

79

This world has been a cosy, settled place
For men with true love's madness have been few;
The more goblets and cups stand filled with wine
The more wanting in revellers must the tavern be.

80

How am I to reveal the ardour of my mind?
A passing thought of madness sets the wilderness ablaze.

81

*Behold how passion's upsurge makes all creation reel:
The keenness of the sword bursts from its breast of steel.

82

My heartache is too proud to suffer remedy:
I am content, I have my pain, my pride.

83

She is all courtesy, her hand
In greeting raised, touches her curls,
Scattering the wealth of charm her shoulders bear.

Awareness should be enemy of sight, sight of the eye,
Come in such splendour that neither you know it nor I.

84

Passion has veils from beauty's countenance removed, there's nought
Obstructs the vision but the vision itself.

85

Beauty of disposition is a make-believe,
but would you for yourself
This truth discover, foster you desire, consider charm
A suppliant at the shrine of love.

86

I marvel at my musk-anointed wound of love: a taper's flame
Clothed with the perfumed darkness of the night.

87

'Tis a scarred evening where I make
A darker shadow; though I'm meeting her
The time will pass too soon, my taper's flame
Already has the blossoming glow of dawn.

By morning I must reach my journey's end
Smoke of the burning taper is dust raised on my road.

88

Let heaven wreak destruction on this universe,
But may the vows of love be strong and ever stronger.

89

Through love my nature learnt to relish life,
Found cure for pain and pain that has no cure.

*Again my heart is restless, again my breast
Yearns for the mortal wound of love,

90

In this madhouse we call the world I've like the candle made
Love's flame the be-all and the end-all of my life.

91

We mean feigned anger and disdain, and conquettish glances,
But we must say love's armoury has daggers, swords and lances.

92

The higher we aspire the greater grace bestowed—
The drop disdaining to be pearl is tear in lover's eye.

93

Love's ardour feels confined even within my heart,
When the sea's restlessness can in a pearl repose.

94

I am a bird imprisoned in the fowler's love.
It's not that I have lost the power of flight.

95

The paleness of my countenance is the faint glow of dawn:
A proper setting, is it not, for flowers of charm of bloom?

96

Don't mind them, they are men who cling
To old, discarded notions,
Imagining that wine and song
Allay the agonies of love.
I cannot tell how long I've been
A denizen of this wretched world.
If reckoning the days I also count
The endless nights in separation spent.

97

Beauty and love work boldly hand in hand:
One strews the path with thorns as sharp as swords,
The other raises blisters on the naked feet.

*Blushing avert your face to hide love's strain,
And I'll forego endearments and caresses;
Flash anger from your dark, dishevelled tresses
And I'll not ask for jewelled smiles again.

98

'T was her intent that I should pass
A sleepless life, waiting for her to come,
When in a dream I heard her vow
That she would come again.

99

Awareness of her beauty makes her bashful
Even when she's alone; how unconcealed the charm
That hides itself behind a blush.

100

Oh God, she does not understand, she'll never understand!
Give her another heart or else give me another tongue.

101

We make a picture, you dressing your curls
And I wrapped in my thoughts of far away.

It needs a life-time for a sigh to touch your heart:
Who could then live to see your tresses full uncurled.

That you'll not be neglectful of my love, I trust,
But till you know of it I may have turned to dust.

The sun teaches the dew how to surrender life,
And beauty's gracious glance would end my sorrows too.

102

It's not a question now of how to meet and talk
But of what to say when words are wasted breath.
I must observe rules of propriety, in spite of storms within,
And she's tongue-tied with modesty: Is there a way for love?

Tell me yourself how wretched worshippers can bear
Their misery, if the idols they adore
Here all a cruel nature such as yours.

You're vexed at your own image in the looking-glass
As if it were a rival; what if in this town
There were a few of flesh and blood like you?

103

Ah, well, she does not worship God,
what if she's faithless too,
Why go to her and risk your soul, if she's a snare for you?

104

To him are sleep and peace of mind and nights
Upon whose arm your tresses scattered lie.

105

Do not persistently enquire of me
What wrongs I've suffered at your hands;
Rake not my heart, a fire lies buried there.

She has no depth of feeling, still she is the beloved:
Let's talk of flowing movement,
and charm distilled from wine.

Spring comes but for a while, still it is spring:
Let's talk of meadows green and breezes soft and cool.

106

There are strong rumours she will come to me,
And just today the sackcloth that I had is gone.

107

Desire is deep engrossed in this and that,
As if 'tis now or never, were there no death
We would not savour life.

108

I long for that release from care when I could lose
Myself in thoughts of my beloved—and no day or night.

109

Look at me straight, without reserve, no more
Of non-committal glances mocking hope and patience.

110

I am all radiance from eye to heart:
A lovers' union is a festival of lights.

111

*Artless, artful, aware, unaware,
The closed eyes of beauty are my despair.

112

Just a warm glance and I shall melt like candle in its flame
Beauty need not adorn itself for those lost in its love.

She's like a land of beauty where to wander
Is ecstasy for which I would surrender
All taverns that there are, for wine itself
Pays tribute to the ardour of her eyes.

113

With her proud beauty she is minded me to slay,
While my heart melts in anguish from the wound inflicted:
The sword was keen, the glance is keener still.

114

Beauty's supreme when in indifference clothed,
As sad dark eyes are sadder still when closed.

115

Restraint of modesty reflects worlds of regard; I know
Whence springs the indignation in the tell-tale glance.

116

I'm captivated by the means she's chosen
To practise cruelty on me;
Not that I do not know the false allure
Of vows of faithfulness made only to be broken.

117

She who would captive take will watch and wait,
And forge the glance that hearts can penetrate;
The eye of chastity has an exalted aim,
Seeking the ways its passion to disclaim.

118

She strikes me speechless and yet speech expects,
When only silence can reveal the passion in my heart.

When my beloved's countenance revealed its splendour,
Her tresses were night's darkness enveloping the moon.

119

A word, a smile, a sign to show
You care for me will light my hopes,
I shall be as a city gay with merry, quivering lamps.

120

No words can my deep thankfulness express
For her gracious concern, solicitude, enquiry, all unspoken.

121

I'm going to her to describe the distress that I feel:
I'm going, yes, but still I wonder what I'll say.

122

This curse of love was quite enough to ruin any man;
Fate need not be his enemy who has you for a friend.

123

I've given my heart away to her, so why this mournful song?
When there's no heart within the breast,
the mouth should have no tongue.

Her disposition will not change,
why should I change my ways,
Turn, idiotic, ask her why she is displeased with me?

124

Since I'm no more
Beauty is no more vexed by coquetry's demands
And those who tortured lovers now can rest;

There's no one now worthy of the lover's role
And grace and charm have lost their lofty state;

From an extinguished taper smoke will rise:
Love's flame wears black as mourning for me now.

Who now dare quaff the heady wine of love?
The saqi asks, looks round and asks again.

I grieve to think of love's forlorn and friendless state;
Whose heart will now the flood of tears contain?

125

That grief of parting and that joy of meeting.
Those nights and days, those months and years are gone.

Who cares now for the delicate affairs of love?
Whom does longing for beauty hold in thrall?

My heart is not the same, not even my mind,
I've lost the eloquent craze for beauty-spots and down.

'T was contemplation of a form, its grace and charm
That gave me buoyancy and youthful spirit.
Now all is gone.

126

Don't stand so far away to show how like a rose-bud is your mouth,
I want a kiss, give me your lips, to show me this is how.

How can I not sit silent, when facing her 'midst friends,
For her own silence is a sign to show me this is how.

I was distracted when she asked how senses could be lost:
A crazy breeze began to blow, to show me this is how.

127

In wine is life, soon as the cup is grasped
Lines of the hand begin like heart-strings to pulsate.
Capriciousness of the inebriate saqi bears
As in a litter my desire; it's vain to try
And keep it under guard within
The world of fancy conjured up by wine.

128

We may talk as we like of visions and things divine,
There is no way we can avoid mention of cup and wine.

129

How strange and sad that I should leave
Thirsty when others drank their fill;
If I had vowed not to touch wine
Why should the saqi have forgot
Her pleasant duty to fulfil ?

130

Despair of the deprived has magnified
The images of wine; the waves appear
As but the drunken stretching of the shore.

131

*There's wine in the air
To breathe is to drink.

132

At least once in my life I must
Let flesh be on its mettle—Ardour of love,
Give me to drink such wine
As only a full man can hold!

133

Some have less thirst, O Saqi, some can never drink enough:
If you're a stormy sea of wine, I am the drowsy shore
Stretching itself, asking for more and more.
Parched lip of those who've died of thirst,
I am for heart-sore pilgrims a shrine;
Image of self-created grief, I smile
As if it is a way to open hearts;

A stranger turned away, hoping to be recalled,
I am a word the speaker would unspeak;
A perfect mirror of the broken spirit
I am the will of those who droop in grief;

*I'm all suspicion, all despair
Like the heart lured and betrayed
By the sweet words of the fair;

*Seeming not to mind at all
Yet inwardly in anguish,
I am the smile of fading flowers
That in the autumn languish.

134

I long to break my chains, but then I fear
My madness will but add to my disgrace—
Better let prudence be my guide

To ways of momentary, small relief.
If I look out upon the world I see
The common faith blaming all ills on fate;
I think It's better far to let my mind
Create insensibility with the stuff
Of selfishness and cautious circumspection.
But still I would not that my heart became
Cold or inert; much rather should my life
Reflect the image of the futile sigh.
But then I am, O God, from head to heart,
Embodiment of pain that knowledge brings;
Better my world became a dream sea at whose shore
I stand in endless wonder.
Stark destitution: beggar's hand outstretched
For something to erase the crushing lines of want;
In utter nakedness dreaming up rags
On which frenzy can vent its feeble wrath!

Illusive products of fate's jugglery
Ambition's rising stars that glow and vanish,
Leaving behind shame-faced amazement and remorse.

Madness is sheer conceit and resignation vain,
While crippled wings prevent our flight
Into the peaceful void of non-existence.

Strangers by nature, men gather and mix and part;
In waves, like grazing flocks of deer; ties form and break,
And woe to those ensnared in bonds of love!

I am a bird seething with urge to fly
And my whole world is but a narrow cell;
So in my heart I must let bleed to death
My longing for the free and open air.

With head bruised by the stones of circumstance,
What dignity has man, now by frivolity disabled
And now weighed down with grief?

I am a garden of desire, I pluck
Visions of beauty, as I would pluck flowers;
I am a nightingale filled with a thousand songs,
Tongue-tied, alas, by rigorous laws of speech.

135

A chain can only clank, so be content—
Your substance and reward is your lament.

136

The wreck of hope was all I gained from love—
Heart joined to heart was lip on lip
Of speechless sorrow.
Walking with blistered feet it seems I tread on my own heart:
Inured to pain, what fear have I of further hardships on the way?

137

Asad, doomed to calamity, was in a thousand ways consumed.
A moth made for the flame of Glory manifest on earth.

138

The eye is like a craftsman making
Things that can never be: Look where you will
This world, peopled or not, is all
Waste land, where life will never thrive.

139

Insensibility offers rest and peace of mind,
Better sleep dreamless in its lap than suffer
The nightmare that is deemed awareness of this world.

140

All eyes reflect futility of desire, the world
Is like a carpet laden with treasures of joy:

The sound of laughter spans both heaven and earth.
Grotesque indeed the way Existence sells itself—
A market where the heart, each time it falls in price
Raises a bitter laugh.

141

We are fettered within life's dungeon, what can freedom mean
To sparks embedded in the granite's veins.

142

The flickering of the candle's light at the approach of dawn
Is to me flutter of remorse at my own unavailing life.
Despair is wine enough, I care no more
For what the saqi offers; the intoxicated
Will cross a river and not slake their thirst.

143

I am ashamed at the destruction love has wrought; there's now
Nothing left in my home but longing for a home.

144

My tears are so intent on sweeping off my home
That desolation drips from doorways and from walls.

145

With my creation was conceived a manner of decay:
the husbandman's hot blood
Presages lightning that consume his gathered corn.

146

How desolate indeed this world must be!
The desert waste reminds me of my home.

147

Unquenched desire for life has blotched
My heart, like an extinguished taper
No longer worthy of its place I go.

148

In my heart there's no relish left for meeting the beloved,
Even her memory has faded; I'm like a house burnt down
In such a fire that all has turned to ashes.

149

Despair has cast on me a mortal spell;
I'm jealous of my own desire to see my love.

*This universe is nothing but
Thyself in peerless glory:
We exist, since Beauty takes
Delight in seeing Itself.
What heartlessness to make us see
Life's spectacle and not enjoy or learn,
What misery to yearn for things
When soul and body both are nought.
The notes of life and death
Pitched high or low
Are but a screech;
Sober and mad
Are fatuous distinctions;
Foolish, this brag of knowledge,
Futile, this prayer and fasting;
Dregs of a stupefying cup
Our Here and our Hereafter.

Notes and References

[1] Lester Hutchinson, *European Freebooters in Moghul India*, Asia Publishing House, 1964, pp. 155-56.

[2] ibid., p. 178.

[3] Free as opposed to slave.

[4] There is apparently no such restriction in Sanskrit literature. But if we define a 'free' woman as one born of *human parents* and brought up to be a wife and mother, with the responsibility of maintaining the ethical standards of family life, we would find that in poetry, drama and novels the restriction generally did apply. It does not apply to the Buddhist *Jatakas*.

[5] Ghalib in a Persian *mathnavi* refers to a controversy between the believers in the Unity of Existence and the Unity of Phenomena. But he has nothing noteworthy to say about either.

[6] 27th December, 1797.

[7] Fetters means his wife, who was eleven at the time of her marriage.

[8] 'Handcuffs' were two orphaned boys of his family whom he took in his charge.

[9] A black powder rubbed on the teeth to bring out the whiteness.

[10] Ghulam Rasool Mehr, *Ghalib*, Muslim Printing Press, Lahore, 1936, pp. 35-40.

[11] I.A. Arshi (ed.), *Makatib-i-Ghalib*. Bombay, 1937.

[12] M.H. Azad, *Ab-i-Hayat*, Lahore, 12th edn., p. 529.

[13] A game like ludo, in which moves are made by throwing dice.

[14] Hali, *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, Majlis Taraqqi-e-Adab, Lahore, 1963, p. 98.

[15] ibid., p. 100.

[16] Mehr, *op. cit*,, p. 208.

[17] Highest police officer of a town.

[18] Mehr, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

[19] We cannot, however, be quite sure about his preferences. Writing in Persian he tells the reader that his Urdu collection is colourless. Later, when he had reverted to Urdu, he says,

> If any ask how Urdu can the envy
> of Persian be,
> Read to him Ghalib's verses once,
> to show him this is how.

[20] Khurshidul Islam, *Ghalib*. Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind), Aligarh, 1960.

[21] W. Leaf, *Versions from Hafiz*, pp. 5-6, quoted in A.J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilisation*. George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1964, p. 349.

[22] It was a belief that pearls were formed by drops of rain from a particular type of cloud.

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